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Neighbors fight proposal for women's recovery house in Westminster

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Westminster residents urged Carroll County commissioners at their meeting Thursday not to approve a proposal to open a recovery house for women and their children in a Westminster neighborhood.

The Westminster Rescue Mission has proposed building a recovery house at 35 N. Tannery Road, an 11.59-acre property that includes a 2,525-square-foot house built in 1975. Neighbors also voiced objections in 2023 to a previously proposed location for the women's recovery home at 327 Crowl Road.

The rescue mission has spent the last year evaluating new properties in the county and came up with the Tannery Road location. Last year, the county was awarded a $1.75 million grant for the recovery home. The home would be used to house several women dealing with addiction and help them reunite with their children.

In May 2023 District 5 Commissioner Ed Rothstein was the lone vote against the Crowl Road application withdrawal, saying he supported the location and the rescue mission's efforts.

"This is not a blight on our community that we have services like this," he said in 2023. "This is, to me, a resource that should be embraced by everybody and say, 'This is what Carroll County does.' We recognize a problem and we come up with a solution. It's unfortunate that sometimes folks don't like change."

Residents living near and around the Tannery Road location told commissioners on Thursday the Westminster Rescue Mission is not welcome there.

"I'm here with our fellow neighbors together as a community to oppose the addiction recovery house on Tannery Road," said Signe Pringle, a resident of Kelly's Court in Westminster. "We're all not just individual addresses on the street here. We're a tight and very secure neighborhood.

"Let me start by saying Westminster Rescue Mission is a strong community member with remarkable contributions and proudly serves the ones in need," she said. "However, the proposed location for the new initiative that has no plan for long-term liability and sustainability ... is not just physically irresponsible, but also the proposed location makes absolutely no sense ...

“Let’s not just forget your role,” Pringle said to commissioners. “You are elected officials whose sole responsibility is to serve the interest of the citizens of Carroll County, and that is us.”

Christian Glenn, a Tannery Road resident, said the recovery shelter would create a toxic environment that would be a detriment to the people the Westminster Rescue Mission wants to help.

“This project should not go forward at this time as planned due to the inadequate road that provides the only point of access,” Glenn said. “This is a single-lane dirt private road. There are no shoulders, no sidewalks, no lighting. When two vehicles come head-to-head entering or exiting there are several proportions where there is nowhere to go … It is unsafe for my family, it is unsafe for the future residents of the shelter.

“I’m not some NIMBY yuppie here to demonize individuals coming up in recovery. I myself am coming up on four years of sobriety. I’m a father, a husband, a farmer, a resident, who has a legitimate and simple request from the county to address before we move forward on this project.”

Zachary Miller, of Westminster, said he and his neighbors were not notified by the county of the proposed shelter, even though at a Jan. 3 commissioner meeting officials said letters were sent to neighbors and phone calls were being made as well.

“It would have been in the best interest of the county residents, the county commissioners and the Westminster Rescue Mission to handle this in a honest, open and transparent matter,” Miller said. “This is a $1.75 million taxpayer-funded grant. This should be handled properly. It was not … The (Westminster Rescue Mission) has not acted in good faith, and the county government does not seem concerned.”

At least one person offered support for the recovery shelter.

“For too long society has treated addiction as something to hide, fear or ignore,” said Jimmy Gast, program coordinator for the HOFFA Foundation’s men’s recovery home in Sykesville. Established in 2020, the nonprofit was created to support individuals and families who are affected by addiction by providing recovery services, promoting community awareness and offering a home for men who are in addiction recovery.

“We’ve separated alcohol and drug addiction as if they are unrelated problems. This approach has contributed to what is now highly recognized as an addiction epidemic ... People fear recovery residences believing they bring crime or community burdens. These fears stem from some of the poorly run sober homes that have been a part of our communities in the past.”

Gast said the proposed women’s recovery house would change lives for the better.

“Certified homes like the one being proposed are going to be the solution,” he said.

Commissioners made no final decisions Thursday.

Have a news tip? Contact Sherry Greenfield at sgreenfield@baltsun.com, 240-315-7029 and @sherrygreenfie9 on X.